



Income Maintenance News

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Fall 2003

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Outlook: DHFS Vision, Goals and Strategy for Income Maintenance Programs



In keeping with the vision and mission of The Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), several important goals for the Income Maintenance (IM) programs have been developed. DHFS staff is working with a myriad of valued partners to serve customers more effectively, efficiently, and holistically.

Income Maintenance program goals are to:

- Improve Wisconsin citizens' health status.
- Provide excellent customer service.
- Assure program integrity.
- Reduce administrative costs.
- Stimulate Wisconsin's economy through increased federal revenue.

Income Maintenance programs include:
Food Stamps,
Medicaid (including BadgerCare and SeniorCare, Family Care), SSI Caretaker Supplement, and Funeral and Cemetery Aids.

To meet these goals, the Bureaus of Income Maintenance and Health Care Eligibility have set specific targets for 2004:

1. Food Stamp payment error rate of 6% or less.
2. Family Medicaid error rate of 5% or less.
3. Food Stamp/Medicaid negative error rate of 0%.
4. Food Stamp participation rate increase to at least 80%.
5. Food Stamp/Medicaid timely case processing rate of 100%.

Many exciting strategies and projects are underway to help the Department meet its priorities of program access, program accuracy, and local agency workload reduction. One important strategy is the **increased use of technology**. It is expected that in many IM arenas, web technology will allow faster and more accurate transactions, as well as increased access to IM services. Examples of technology initiatives include:

1. Web-based tools and interfaces for workers and customers (currently in development).
2. Various opportunities to utilize distance-learning techniques are being explored in order to minimize travel time and other expenditures while maximizing learning effectiveness.

Also underway are several initiatives that will allow **substantial workload reduction** for the local agency staff administering the IM programs. These initiatives include:

<u>Initiative</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
Food Stamp (FS) reduced reporting	Phased approach, July 2003 – July 2004
Auto update from third party sources	Phased approach (i.e., NewHire and UCB enhancements)
Notice re-design Phases II and III	September and December 2003
Automated case directory	Implemented on Sept. 26, 2003
Re-engineered data exchange	Phased approach
Web-based library/online handbooks	Phased approach

In addition, the Department is committed to **partnerships with local IM agencies** via the Income Maintenance Advisory Committee, and an enhanced communication strategy.

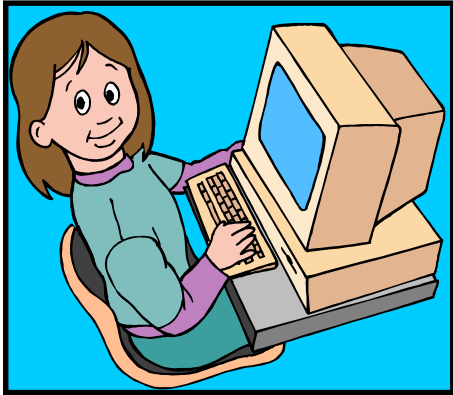
Other IM priorities include decreasing the Food Stamp (FS) error rate, conducting FS outreach, and implementing changes included in the 2003-05 State budget.

Continue to watch the *Income Maintenance News* for updates on Income Maintenance priorities and projects.

Food Stamp Application Processing: Essential Elements of Eligibility Processing

Staci Wanty, Food Stamp Area Lead Trainer

To reduce Food Stamp errors that may occur when processing a case, a training program called "Food Stamp Application Processing: Essential Elements of Eligibility" has been developed. Effective July 26, 2003, the first phase of reduced change reporting for Food Stamps (FS) was implemented. It is anticipated that this policy change will result in fewer client-caused errors due to failure to report changes during the certification periods. However, cases must be established correctly at certification, re-certification and change in order to reduce the overall error rate. This training program provides tools and resources to assist in "getting it right the first time".



Topics covered in the training include issues that have been identified by FS policy staff and statewide error letters as areas that need reinforcement. They include:

1. Timely processing of applications.
2. Household composition issues.
3. Income and expense budgeting at the time of intake, review and reported change.

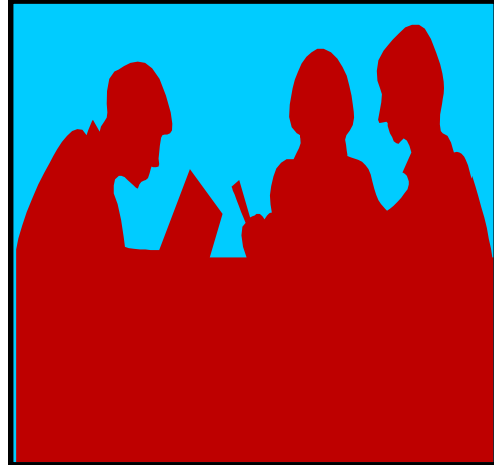
In addition, the training covers effective interviewing techniques as well as policy, process, and automation clarifications, updates and "best practices".

As of Sept. 15, 2003, this training became available as a multi-step, self-paced and flexible distance learning experience. The FS Application Processing course consists of three parts:

Part I is an online FS Application Processing quiz using <http://www.Quia.com>.

Final results from the quiz as of Oct. 31, 2003:

- A total of 961 people completed the online quiz.
- 28 people achieved a perfect score; 37 individuals scored 97% (one incorrect answer).
- 84% of all ES workers statewide took the quiz; Milwaukee participation was 85%!
- Congratulations to the 43 agencies with 100% participation: Brown, Calumet, Clark, Columbia, Crawford, Dodge, Door, Douglas, Eau Claire, Fond du Lac, Grant, Iowa, Jefferson, LaCrosse, Lafayette, Lincoln, Marathon, Marinette, Marquette, Menominee, Monroe, Oconto, Ozaukee, Pepin, Portage, Price, Racine, Richland, Rock, Rusk, St. Croix, Sauk, Sawyer, Sheboygan, Taylor, Vernon, Washington, Waukesha, Waupaca, Winnebago, Red Cliff Tribe, Stockbridge-Munsee Tribe, Sokaogaon Tribe.



Part II is a printable workbook using case scenarios and CARES screens to illustrate policy examples and application processing procedures. This part of the training was available until November 28. The design of the workbook accommodated flexible presentation styles. It could be completed individually or in a group setting. Agencies used both methods, and feedback on the content of the workbook has been positive.

Part III is a hands-on activity involving CARES. The interactive activity simulated CARES screens and stressed the impact of data entries on FS benefit amounts. This part of the training was accessible until December 12.

As of Monday, November 24, 349 participants completed Part III of the course. Part III was designed to be accessed by individual workers and completed individually. Individual completion of the course and the evaluation will assure credit for course completion, and will provide an individualized course completion certificate. If you are interested in using this section in

another type of setting, or need information on ensuring credit for participants who complete this course, please contact Theresa Fosbinder by email at FostbiTL@dhfs.state.wi.us.

To get more information or to access the course, go to the Training Partner Services website at <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/destrain/trainsec/>.

Reduced Change Reporting for Food Stamps: Phase II Update

Sara Edmonds, Food Stamp Policy Analyst

Phase II of Reduced Change Reporting for Food Stamps (FS) is scheduled to be implemented on Feb. 28, 2004, as FS applications and reviews are confirmed.

The following is the tentative policy and process plan:

- All households (except migrant or homeless households) will be certified for 12 months. Migrant and homeless households will continue to be certified for six months. All households certified for 12 months (except those qualifying for Elderly, Blind or Disabled without earnings) will be required to complete and submit an interim report form in the sixth month of their certification period.
- Reduced change reporting requirements will remain in effect during the certification period. Most FS households are required to report only if their total household income exceeds 130% of the Federal Poverty Level for their reported household size.
- Households subject to interim reporting will be sent a reminder asking them to retain and include pay stubs and other required verification with the interim report form when they receive it.
- The interim report forms will require FS recipients to report and verify earned income received in the calendar month prior to the report's due date. The interim report form will also require FS recipients to report and verify other changes such as household composition, address and resulting shelter costs, unearned income, assets exceeding the household asset limit, and the legal obligation to pay child support.

Based on a February implementation date, the first interim report forms will be generated in June 2004 for households certified from February 2004 through January 2005.

The Program and Policy Coordination sub-committee of the Income Maintenance Advisory Committee will continue to serve as the State's advisory committee for policy implementation including interim report form content and format.

Transitional Food Stamps: A New Food Stamp Initiative for Families Leaving W-2 and Tribal TANF

Jayne Wanless, Food Stamp Policy Analyst

The federal 2002 Farm Bill allows states to freeze Food Stamp (FS) benefits for five months for families who stop receiving W-2 (CSJ, W-2 T or CMC) or Tribal TANF monthly cash payments. Starting in March, these families in Wisconsin will be eligible for Transitional Food Stamps (TFS). Extending FS benefits for five months will ease the shift to work and provide a safety net to families who may lose cash assistance for other reasons.

CARES will automatically start TFS. The TFS benefit amount is calculated using income, expenses and household information from the month prior to the last W-2 payment. The gross W-2 or Tribal TANF amount will also be deducted for the TFS calculation, so most households will receive the maximum allotment of FS. No contact with the household is necessary for TFS to start. Families are not obligated to report changes to the worker while receiving TFS. Changes reported for other programs will not affect the TFS benefit.

The Department of Health and Family Services is in the process of adding TFS to CARES. Agencies will receive detailed policy information and training tools prior to implementation.

Thirteenth Annual BIG TEN Food Stamp Program Improvement Conference

Lisa Hanson, Food Stamp Corrective Action Manager

The 13th Annual BIG TEN Food Stamp Program Improvement Conference was held Aug. 20-22, 2003, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with the theme, "A Whole New Ballgame". The Conference focused on the many changes and opportunities available to states through the 2002 Farm Bill, and presented a valuable opportunity for staff to meet individuals from other states and discuss best practices.



The BIG TEN Food Stamp Improvement Conference represents counties/project areas in the Midwest Region that annually issue approximately \$10 million in food stamp benefits. This year there were 428 registered participants including staff from Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, the USDA/Food and Nutrition Service, 55 Wisconsin county/tribal agencies, and several special guests from states in other regions.

Participant evaluations indicated overwhelming satisfaction with the events and outcomes. Overall rating, job relevancy, and motivation ratings were excellent to good.

Your suggestions and input are extremely important to the success of food stamp payment accuracy. Please feel free to contact Lisa Hanson at (608) 266-5483, or hansolm@dhfs.state.wi.us, if you have anything you would like to share with DHFS or local agencies.

Food Stamp Payment Accuracy and You

John Haine, Section Chief of Program Evaluation

Here is a quick update on Food Stamp payment accuracy.

The Good News: Our error rate through June of this year is at **9.5%**, which is **3% lower** than last year's error rate of **12.6%**.

The Bad News: The national average error rate is currently at 6.5%.

More Good News: By law there is no sanction for any state for federal fiscal year 2003.

Even More Good News: Reduced change reporting has been implemented. This should help in terms of both payment accuracy and reduced workload.

Some information you may not be aware of: There is usually a 4-month lag in the Quality Assurance review process. That's why we are reporting June results now. Also, the reporting time period is a federal fiscal year that runs from October through the following September.

Congratulations: On the error reduction accomplishments in Federal Fiscal Year 2003.

Belated Congratulations: Belated congratulations to two of Wisconsin's Income Maintenance agencies (with QA samples greater than 30 cases per year) for their work in 2002. Kenosha had an error rate of 6.1% and Rock had an error rate of 5.8%. Both were well below the federal tolerance level of 8.6%. Great work!

Remember: Focus on quality applications and reviews as well as prompt action on reported changes in Federal Fiscal Year 2004, which started in October.

CARES Web Initiatives

Dave Hippler, Information Systems Business Analyst

The Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) has started working with Deloitte Consulting to develop a web-based CARES system. That makes this a perfect time to "clean up" screens and processes and make other improvements.

DHFS would like to do this with input from the CARES Coordinators. To do this an online survey has been developed which will provide developers with a better idea of how state employees utilize CARES. This information will be utilized by agencies in the development process. Future plans include another survey for all CARES users in all jobs. These online surveys will require no paper or stamps and should only take a few minutes to complete.

In addition, an End-User Group has been formed to help develop the surveys mentioned above, communicate with staff, and make recommendations for improvements. Look for a new web link soon on the [Eligibility Management page](#) for information on the CARES Web Initiatives and survey results.

Update on the BadgerCare State Budget Provision

Michelle Pauser, CARES Information and Problem Resolution Center

Effective Jan. 1, 2004, the premium amount for BadgerCare recipients will increase from 3% to 5% of the family's income. CARES changes, including a mass change in December, will ensure that premium coupons sent out at adverse action have the new premium amount.

In addition, there will be new requirements to verify insurance access and coverage, as well as wages, before BC benefits can be confirmed. IM agency workers should watch for an upcoming Operations Memo regarding the new verification procedures.

Outreach Initiatives

Stacia Jankowski, Policy Analyst

The Food Stamp (FS) Program is one of the largest public assistance programs in the United States, and serves roughly 1 in 10 Americans. Participation in the FS Program is an essential means of ensuring that our low-income residents are healthy and able to access the foods necessary for a well-balanced diet.

To reach more individuals eligible for the FS Program, DHFS has implemented the following initiatives:

1. Food Stamps Make Wisconsin Healthier Brochure.
A brochure, originally created by the USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, has been revised to make it specific to Wisconsin. An electronic version of this brochure can be found on the Department of Health and Family Service (DHFS) website (http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/em/fspubs/pubs/phc_16063.pdf) or can be ordered through the Department's form center.
2. Food Stamp Recipient Services Hotline (1-800-362-3002).
Beginning in December 2003, the Medicaid Recipient Services Hotline will be expanded to include the FS Program. Applicants and recipients will be able to call the hotline and receive answers to basic questions about food



stamps in addition to the SSI State Supplement and Medicaid, as well as find the location of their local county or tribal social or human services department.

3. A letter was sent to Food Pantry Coordinators in Wisconsin informing them of the availability of brochures, a self-screener, information on our website and the availability of a FS training course developed for community based organizations.

QC Corner: Timely Issuance

Marcia Williamson, Quality Assurance Specialist

Food Stamp Quality Assurance (QA) Reviewers are now required to analyze more than payment accuracy of Food Stamp (FS) sampled cases. Effective this federal fiscal year, the FNS reviews and rewards qualifying states for participation rates and timely issuance of benefits in the evaluation of each state's FS program success.

As a result, Wisconsin QC will review all cases in the monthly QC sample to determine the timeliness of application processing for cases opened during the current fiscal year.

Based on reviews conducted to date, the errors we see most commonly include:

1. Errors on expedited or regular issuance when an individual requests food stamps in an existing case already receiving other benefits (for example, a customer requesting food stamps at a child care review). *Workers focused on the review sometimes forget to:*
 - Document the date food stamps are formally requested.
 - Enter that date on the ACPA screen.
 - Remember the customer is entitled to 30 days to provide verifications even if CARES allows only 10 days.

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Send comments, ideas, or submissions to: Jon Bartels at Bartejm@dhfs.state.wi.us

2. Errors on mail-in MA only application where the customer also contacts the agency to request food stamps. (For example, a customer sends in a MA mail-in application form and then calls to request food stamps). *Food stamp applications require face-to-face interviews with a valid certification at that time. Before scheduling an interview date, workers should explain the need for a signed request to establish the food stamp begin date, as well as screen for priority services.*

Some Handy Web Sites:

The Income Maintenance News:

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/imnews/index.htm>

MA Handbook:

http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/ma_handbook/

CARES Updates:

http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/cares_updates/index.htm

Eligibility Management:

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/index.htm>

DHFS:

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/>

Policy Notification:

http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/em/policy_notification/signup.htm